

## An Insect Spray Leaves Homes Uninhabitable

By The New York Times

PASCAGOULA, Miss., Nov. 16 — Beth Hobdy did not become suspicious of the man who sprayed her house near here last month for roaches and ants until her two toddlers began vomiting and running high fevers.

When the family's doctor could not pinpoint why 2-year-old Christopher and 8-month-old Courtney were ill, Ms. Hobdy and her husband, William, began wondering about the strong odor that clung to the interior of their house.

Unknown to the Hobdy family, the rotten-egg smell was the same odor that often hangs above the cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta, 200 miles northwest of this Gulf Coast city. The exterminator whom Mrs. Hobdy had paid \$65 to spray for pests common to the humid South had coated her walls and floors with methyl parathion, a toxic farm insecticide that the Federal Agriculture Department approves only for outdoor spraying on some crops.

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Two exterminators are accused of using a toxic weevil spray indoors.

Point, Miss. The two purchased enough methyl parathion to have sprayed at least 2,000 buildings, the investigators said.

recommended for fighting boll weevils.

The authorities would not say where the men bought the methyl parathion, although they said it was from legal sources. The homes of the two men were searched after the authorities obtained warrants.

At the Hobdy house, carpet samples and wall swabbings taken by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce "tested off the scale," E.P.A. agents said. Those tests, and later ones taken from other sites, found contamination at least five times the level that requires immediate evacuation of humans and animals, agents said.

Comparable levels of methyl parathion found in a house in Tunica, Miss., in 1984 — the result of a farmer using it as a home pesticide — led to the deaths of two young children.

A teaspoon of methyl parathion can be lethal. The manufacturer, the Shell Chemical Company, warns farmers who use the product to stay out of fields for at least 48 hours after

## Indoor Spraying of a Dangerous Pesticide in Mississippi

### Health problem

- Methyl parathion, a pesticide for outdoor-use only, was sprayed inside more than 2,600 homes in Pascagoula and Hattisburg, Mississippi.
- Previously, two children had died from indoor spraying.
- Many people did not know whether their house had been sprayed or their children had been exposed to the pesticide.

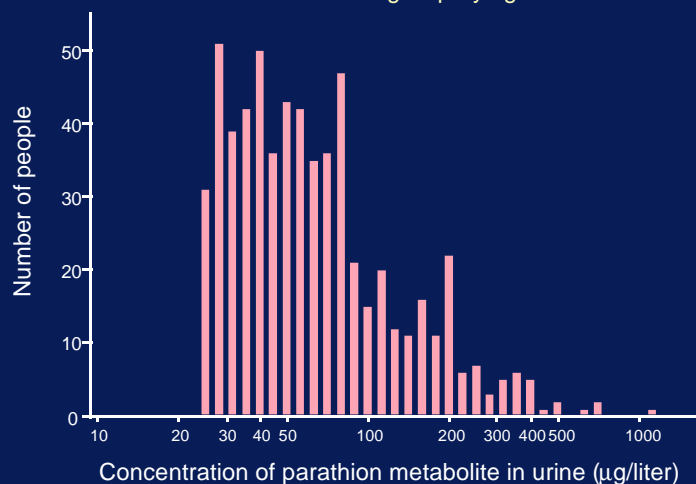
### Lab response

- The lab developed a method to measure the pesticide in urine to determine exposure—no other lab had this capability.
- The lab measured the pesticide in the urine of over 1500 persons believed to be exposed to the pesticide.

### Health impact

- This lab test was the only way to measure individual exposure to this toxic substance.
- Health officials used the results to determine who was exposed, the levels of exposure, and which homes should be evacuated.
- Health officials will remeasure the pesticide levels in persons whose homes are remediated to be sure levels have decreased.

Exposure of persons in selected areas of Mississippi to methyl parathion as a result of illegal spraying



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